

# ‘Rodolfo, Deo Gratias Princeps ad Macao’: A Faked Prince of Macao in 18<sup>th</sup>-Century France

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**ABSTRACT:** On September 24, 1749, a ‘superb black man’, well dressed, speaking and writing French with surprising resourcefulness, was arrested in the port of Morlaix in Finisterre, often frequented by Breton corsairs. Arrested after a fight in a tavern in the city, the person was identified by the Morlaix police as someone wanted in several ports of Brittany for having left many unpaid bills and distributing counterfeit bills of debt and exchange. During the police interrogation, the defendant surprisingly identified himself as the ‘Prince of Macao’ and the elder son of its king, the ‘Grand Lord of Macao’. To the astonishment of the officials, he signed his statements with elegance as ‘Rodolfo, Deo Gratias Princeps ad Macao’. This article investigates this well-documented criminal case and then tries to understand the contexts and reasons for this strange falsification of a supposed ‘Prince of Macao’ in mid-18<sup>th</sup>-century France.

**KEYWORDS:** Rodolfo; Prince of Macao; Morlaix; French Brittany; Bicêtre Hospital-Prison; French East India Company.

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A paper published in 1864 in the selected *Memories Read in the Sorbonne* by the professor and, later, director of the Faculty of Letters of Caen, Aristide Joly (1824–1893), presents a curious inventory of royal letters of justice conserved in his city archive, highlighting among other less vibrant criminal cases the singular dossier of ‘a black adventurer detained in Morlaix’, who, in the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century, claimed to be ‘the son of a prince of the East Indies and great Lord of Macao’.<sup>1</sup>

Very well documented but only briefly summarised by Joly, the historical case is remembered in much more detail on the front page of the *Journal des Débats Politiques et Littéraires*, dated August 16, 1923, displaying a text with the title ‘A Black Prince and the police in the 18<sup>th</sup> century’ signed by Étienne Dupont (1864–1928), local magistrate and historian of Caen.<sup>2</sup> Although following directly some of the historical sources referred to in Aristide Joly’s inventory, Dupont did not resist

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turning the available documents' information into a colourful, creative narrative adapted to the curiosity preferences of hundreds of thousands of readers that followed daily one of the most popular Parisian French newspapers.<sup>3</sup>

Digesting Étienne Dupont's account, during 1749, a black man roamed the Brittany ports, seduced prostitutes, forgot to pay his bills, and deceived several traders with fake letters of exchange in Bordeaux, Bayonne, Rochefort, La Rochelle, Nantes, and Saint-Malo. Sometimes, the strange personage accounted that he was from the West Indies, where his parents had been wealthy planters; on other occasions, he claimed to be from the Ivory Coast or, more often, introduced himself as a 'prince' of the East Indies. Upon his arrival in Saint-Malo, he was lodged at the expense of some traders from Le Havre, to whom he paid with unvalued bills of exchange. During several days, he had been seen in Saint-Malo underworld, prowling, in the evening, from tavern to cabaret, often escaping from paying his arrears and even trying to live from the exploitation of local prostitutes. Endowed with unusual strength, he was occasionally involved in physical scuffles. It seems that one night, facing a hard fight in a cabaret with unloaders of the port, he received a tremendous blow on the mouth and lost a tooth. Later, he vanished from Saint-Malo after making several swindles and leaving behind countless faked letters of exchange and many debts.<sup>4</sup>

### THE ARREST: DOCUMENTS, HISTORY, AND SOME FICTION

The historical sources of the detention of this singular person are still preserved nowadays in the departmental archives of Calvados, in Caen, gathering five original documents produced by different French authorities between September 24, 1749, and March 18, 1750, including a detailed four-page hearing process.<sup>5</sup> The sources highlight a bizarre

historical adventurous case almost on the frontiers of a mythomaniac invention but are naturally not as fictionalised as in Dupont's newspaper short novel. On September 24, 1749, Rodolfo — as he signed his alleged name — was finally arrested in Morlaix, a well-known harbour bay in Finisterre in the 18<sup>th</sup> century as a shelter for Brittany corsairs and market for trading their lootings.<sup>6</sup> Eventually, getting drunk at La Harpe Couronnée, a tavern, and a lupanar on Quai de Léon, owned by an Irish, Thomas Martin, Rodolfo knocked down the owner after threatening him with his knife. The guard had difficulty getting hold of the 'superb black man' while the crowd gathering on the occasion witnessed him shouting loud, 'I am the Prince of Macao'. Incarcerated in the local prison, the police discovered a warrant pending on a person with his exact physical signs. The Morlaix police had been looking for someone like him for about a week and kept correspondence with the Saint-Malo judicial officers who suspected Rodolfo would not return to their city, where he had deceived shipowners, hoteliers, and innkeepers, leaving many debts that he afterwards justified not paying for 'being too noble to work'.<sup>7</sup>

After a night in jail, the culprit was presented to the 'exempt' — the police officer in charge of arrests — Georges François Moreau,<sup>8</sup> assisted by *maître* Guillaume Joseph Huon, the local notary, both confirming that the accused was able to speak and write in French, thus swearing to tell the truth and to sign his testimony. According to the four-page inquiry document, Rodolfo (always written Rodolphe by the clerk) was described as follows: 'man about 5 feet 3 inches (1.74m); slender waist, blackface, black eyes, slender legs; one tooth is missing in the upper jaw; crescent-shaped scar at the outer corner of the left eye; wart at the lower joint of the left index finger'.<sup>9</sup> This description matched very precisely the judicial warrant for a 'black crook' that the police had been searching from Bordeaux

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to Saint-Malo, and the Morlaix police did not doubt that the said Rodolfo was the fugitive. The arrestation process also reported in detail that ‘he was dressed in an old coat of *camelot*, scarlet in color; a greenish jacket, known as the Marseille basin, festooned with white thread embroidery’.<sup>10</sup> Trying to simulate an aristocratic-alike look, the arrested also used ‘gray cloth panties that formed a double puff on his thighs; white woolen stockings; yellow square-toed shoes with steel buckles; a soft, sky-blue tie was tied around his neck; wearing a white shirt, and a soft, brown hat with a peacock feather’.<sup>11</sup>

Being asked about his ‘name, surname, age, profession, residence before his imprisonment’, he answered that ‘his name is Rodolphe, prince of Macao in the East Indies, son of the great Lord of Macao and aged twenty-five’; he also declared that he left Macao on the ‘Kings Day of 1746’ and that his ‘father and mother were still alive but did not want to see him anymore since he became Christian’; consequently, ‘he departed in the ship *Mettais Querquanny* and disembarked in Lisbon, Portugal, thus not having a fixed residence in the last years’.<sup>12</sup> Étienne Dupont published, without documental support, a much more vivid, imaginative narrative: Rodolfo was ‘raised in the palace of his ancestors, and he had met in one of his walks around Macao, a missionary who had converted him to Catholicism and who had administered to him, in great secrecy, the sacrament of baptism’. Unfortunately, ‘another blood prince, hoping to remove the *Dauphin* Rodolphe from the throne of Macao, denounced him to his father. The king was a devout Buddhist; furious at his son’s conversion, he ordered that his head be cut off, but the queen, his mother, made him escape, and he managed to embark for Portugal’. Rodolfo was able to leave Macao in disguise, taking ‘with him a thousand pounds of gold dust, a generous gift from his mother. After he arrived at Lisbon, he was princely treated there, but, for his part, he had

to incur great expenses, wishing to bear a name that was illustrious among the Indies. Too quickly, he threw his gold dust in the eyes of all, and to avoid the witnesses of his splendor feeling sorry for his misery, he went to France, hoping to meet there in Le Havre the rich Dutch merchants with whom he had been in contact at Batavia’. Unluckily, he hadn’t discovered them and resolved to go to Brittany, thinking confidently to find in this ‘good country, so pious, a welcome all the more sympathetic as he, Prince of Macao, had suffered and lost his crown for the love of Our Lord Jesus Christ’.<sup>13</sup>

Returning to the sources, in the following tough counter-interrogation transcribed extensively in the arresting file, Moreau started to ask the accused if he was aware of the reasons for his imprisonment. Rodolfo answered by stressing his complete surprise and ignorance: ‘he didn’t know why the Morlaix police arrested him’. Being inquired if he was the same person being searched in several ports of the ‘province’ for falsification of exchange letters, Rodolfo firmly denied it. Next, Moreau asked the suspect why the police had found on him a ‘passport in the name of Rodolphe Famard, 32 years old, profession navigator, born in Valenciennes to Jacques Famard and Elisabeth Bard’. The accused answered that he found the document on his arrival to France and, ‘being in complete misery, used it to hide his real name and try finding a position of Capitaine to which he couldn’t apply at only 22 years of age’.<sup>14</sup>

Georges Moreau subsequently confronted Rodolfo with seven other identity documents, including two passports written in Spanish, one of which, dated July 12, was signed by Mr. François de Bézabry, consul general at Rochefort. The warrant files identified these passports as being used by a ‘black to commit trickery in several French seaports’. The judicial documents also reported that this individual ‘had a broken tooth following a brawl

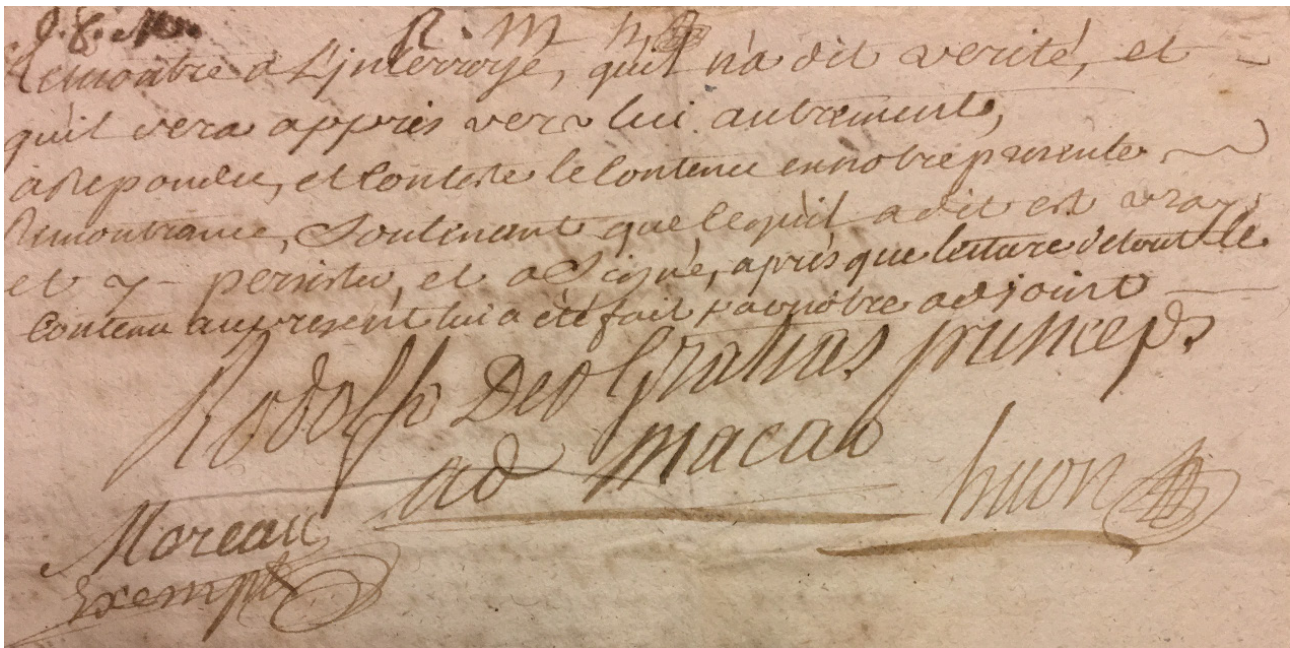


Fig. 1: The last few lines read: Rodolfo Deo Gratias princeps / ad Macao, Moreau / Exempt; ADC: C/430, "Détenition.": Ms. 1749, 24 septembre – Morlaix, fl. 4.

that took place in a cabaret in Saint-Malo' and used 'to carrying an olive wood cane with copper tip and eyelets'. Rodolfo recognised that he had lost a similar cane during his arrest at the La Harpe Couronnée. Still, he denied having falsified the referred identity documents that he legally acquired in order to 'depart to England or another foreign country, the reason for arriving Morlaix'.<sup>15</sup>

Despite all the evidence, from physical traits to several manipulated documents pointing to the same personal source, the indicted kept his testimony integrally, stressing that he was only telling the truth. Finally, on the interrogatory document, the signature affixed by the 'prince' to his declarations was very firm, elegant, and large enough to bring out his pretended high position: *Rodolfo, Deo gratias princeps ad Macao*. This signature occupying prominently the last folio of the process was in stark contrast to the humbler rubrics of (Georges François) 'Moreau, exempt', 'Moreau, exempt', and of the notary (Guillaume Joseph)

'Huon' (Fig. 1). Although the official historical arrest documentation ends up naturally with this set of signings, Étienne Dupont decided to impress the popular readers of the *Journal des Débats Politiques et Littéraires* with a textual extension that offers a satiric final dialogue, aiming to raise the claimed 'intellectual quality' of the Brittany police of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, one of the main objectives of an article that was intended to be amusing and burlesque.

Following this imaginative newspaper narrative again, after checking Rodolfo's grandiloquent signature, Moreau remarked that his Macao story was ridiculous:

[Translation by author] *The people of Macao are not black! And since when, please, has the prince heir to that country been called the Dauphin? I had believed, until now, that this title was only carried by the eldest son of His Majesty the King of France?*



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*It is quite possible, retorted Rodolfo, since my father signed a treaty of alliance with His Majesty Louis the Fourteenth of the name in 1740.*

*Pardon, interrupted Mr. Moreau, His Majesty Louis the Great ceased to make the happiness of his people in 1715; the King of Macao could not deal with him twenty-five years after his death!*

*I am not here to receive lessons of History, remarked the Prince. What am I accused of?*

*Scams, stressed Moreau. You will explain yourself on this subject to the judicial authorities of Caen, who are demanding your presence.*

Returning, finally, to the ‘prince’ signature, Georges Moreau pointed out that Rodolfo made at least four mistakes in six words since he should have written: *Rodulphus, Dei gratia, princeps Macaoniensis*.

‘It is false, clarified Rodolfo, the good missionary who converted me always said after his meals: Deo gratias!’<sup>16</sup>

Despite this fictional dialogue transforming the documented case into a comic and folkloric account, the historical sources highlight that the pretended ‘Prince of Macao’ was definitively arrested and taken back to the bailiwick prison of Morlaix, where he stayed almost forgotten for months. On December 26, orders were given by the central royal government, for the transfer to Caen of the prisoner ‘accused of falsification of exchange letters that he presented to businessmen’.<sup>17</sup> Thereby, almost five months after the original arrest, a Mr. Urvoy de Royan, lieutenant of the constabulary of Rennes, informed the intendant of Caen on February 8, 1750 that the horsemen of Morlaix’s

brigade had just brought him the famous Rodolfo, known as ‘Prince of Macao’.<sup>18</sup> The prisoner and his documental process were received in Caen, but local officials noted that he was suffering from a venereal disease for which the city did not have an adequate hospital to ensure proper treatment. The Justice Minister, to whom a report was made, ordered on February 17, 1750, the transfer of *Rodolfo* to the royal hospital of the ‘contagious’ of Bicêtre, near Paris, a prison, hospital, and asylum for all kinds of delinquents, murderers, vagrants, crooks, pimps, syphilitics, and homosexuals.<sup>19</sup>

## IN BICÊTRE ASYLUM-HOSPITAL

One of the last local documents that survived the arresting process, dated March 17, 1750, is a detailed bill receipt of expenses handwritten by the prisoner in St. Germain at the end of his transfer from Caen to Paris-Bicêtre hospital. The authorities were informed that the voyage of about 200 km took five long days. The prisoner, between meals and overnight stays, spent 32 *sols* and 8 *deniers*: not really expensive, but not as well too cheap since the daily average salary in 1750 of a craftsman was 20 *sols*, an ordinary wine jug cost 15 *sols*, and an entire chicken was usually sold between 6 to 7 *sols*.<sup>20</sup> Much more impressive was again the wide signature at the end of the document: the meticulous ‘Rodolfo Deo Gratias princeps ad Macao’ stood even more magnificent with its grand initial and underlined with a vigorous decorated final trace suggesting a stylised writing plume. However, Rodolfo entered in Bicêtre officially as Rodolphe Barack Famard, since he had been identified in the epochal documentation of the former ‘Admiralty of Morlaix’, nowadays in the departmental archive of Calvados, in a process opened on September 22, 1749, two days before his arrest. In this document, ‘Rodolphe Famard, son of Jacques and Elisabeth Bart, born in Valenciennes, navigator of profession’, is accounted responsible

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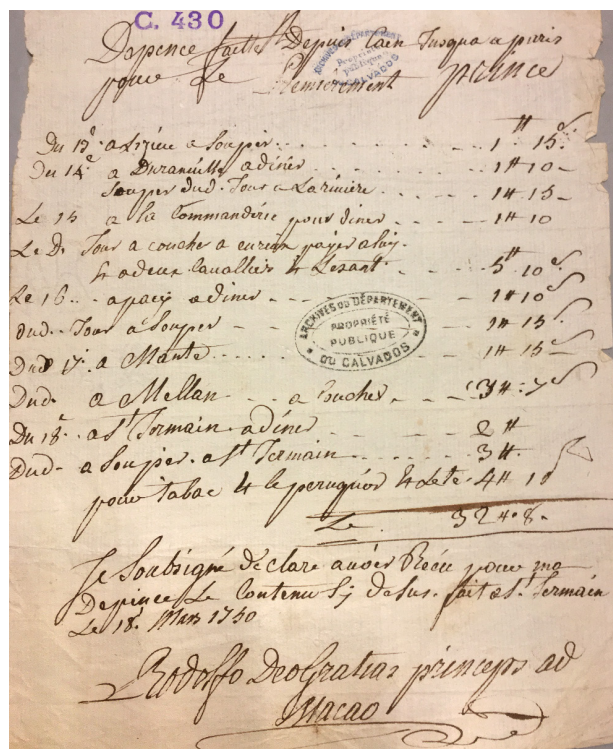


Fig. 2: The last few lines read: Rodolfo Deo Gratias princeps ad / Macao. ADC: Ms. 1750, March 18 – St. Germain, fl. 1.

for a tragic shipwreck near the 'bay of Valencia, in Spain'. This Famard, having that passport alleging an age of 32 years, was captain of a corsair ship of 200 tonnes and 22 cannons, *La Marie Rose*, gathering 40 men, seafaring from Constantinople (Istanbul was still called by its ancient Latin name) to Dunkirk, loaded with 'silk, coffee, wool, and outfits of the French ambassador'. Famard lost the ship and killed 14 sailors before he arrived in Saint-Malo and then vanished. In the margins of this document, someone wrote: 'declaration of Rodolphe Famard, since then calling himself Prince of Macao.'<sup>21</sup>

According to Dupont newspaper's overcoloured account, after arriving in Bicêtre, this strange 'Prince of Macao' was finally sent to the Bastille 'of the poor', where he disappeared forever.<sup>22</sup> It was not the case since he never went to the infamous prison and stayed only roughly ten months in

Bicêtre. The manuscript records of the prison, hospital, and asylum of Bicêtre in the 18<sup>th</sup> century are now part of the Bastille archive preserved in the Arsenal Library, a branch of the National Library in Paris. Despite this organisation, these are different archives from different institutions, although some incarcerated in Bicêtre which were considered more dangerous and violent, ended up being systematically transferred to the Bastille. Still, the majority, including common ill thieves, indigents, vagrants, defectors, panders, countless scammers, and many beggars' orphan adolescents, remained exclusively in the hospital asylum, normally from one to four years.<sup>23</sup>

The primary sources that, for the chronology of our Rodolfo case, are of interest to this investigation do not allow us to assess precise and continuous quantitative figures of prisoners and qualitative details about the internees. However, Rodolphe Barack Famard, or simply Barack, as recorded in the Bicêtre archive files, other than some brief references in general records and lists, has received a very rare individual dossier. For the first half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, there are no more than two dozen preserved singular files mostly reserved for unique prisoners such as disgraced French aristocrats, high military traitors' officers, English spies, bizarre German barons, or fake Scottish surgeons, among others that arrived sick at Bicêtre, generally with venereal diseases.<sup>24</sup> Almost all these dossiers were opened to gather letters and supplications in favour of the prisoners, followed usually by systematic official negative replies.<sup>25</sup> Our 'prince of Macao' did not have anyone to write on his behalf, but he belonged to a very special category of 'exotic' inmates who attracted the fascination of the other prisoners and guards because of his peculiar physical appearance, merging dark colour skin with Arabic or Indian tall body characteristics, unusual strength, and eloquent ability to express himself in elegant

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French, in addition to his continued insistence that he was indeed the prince of Macao.<sup>26</sup>

Under a cover simply written ‘Barack’, nowadays a well-known name of Arabic origin meaning ‘blessed’, the individual dossier of only five pages is more than enough along with the available records to fully understand the transitory passage of Rodolfo through Bicêtre.<sup>27</sup> Upon his arrival, the alleged *prince* was diagnosed by a ‘surgeon’ on March 19, 1750 with venereal syphilis, and was sent to one of the hospital wards where he received adequate medical treatment.<sup>28</sup> In the 1750s, the lessons of Jean Astruc prevailed in French medical practice based on his treatise *De Morbis Veneris*, published in 1736.<sup>29</sup> The book accurately describes syphilis, gonorrhea, and other venereal diseases, advanced treatments based on mercuric chloride pills known as calomel. These famous pills that lasted up to the late 19<sup>th</sup> century were probably effective since our fake Macanese prince left Bicêtre hale in January 1751, before being sent to the harbour of Lorient, and forced to embark in the trading vessels of the French Company of Indies.<sup>30</sup> Rodolfo’s arrest, incarceration, and final punishment through forced labour in the maritime trade campaigns of the French company, labelled as ‘doom to the galleys’, that would become, as we will see later, his last and fatal outcome, deserve some critical attention before any suggested historical interpretation of this Macao princely invention in mid-18<sup>th</sup> century France.

## WHY MACAO?

Despite their helpful information, all these criminal and hospital records do not produce any definite answer to the critical research question: why the forged identity of ‘Prince of Macao’? Was it related to Rodolfo’s maritime experience? Was he a captain, a corsair, or a simple sailor with former overseas activities in the Asian oceans? Unfortunately, the only documented seafaring

reference available, the odd shipwreck story of *La Marie Rose*, cannot document the question with evidence today and it is not easy to confirm from a critical historical perspective. Vessel disasters in Valencia Bay were rare, being much more frequent further south in the dangerous ‘Costa de les Rotes’, in the large maritime channel between Dénia and the island of Ibiza. There are nowadays more than one hundred identified shipwrecks in this area, including French sailboats in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, but there is not any remote reference to *La Marie Rose*’s misfortune in Spanish archives or the documents produced by consuls of France in Valencia, usually mobilised for supporting trade activities in the region by exchanging cotton reexported from Marseille for wool and pass grape.<sup>31</sup> There is no documental remote clue either in the correspondence of the French ambassador in Constantinople from 1747 to 1754, Rolland Puchot, earl of ‘Des Alleurs’, testifying the alleged *La Marie Rose* trip carrying his outfits among other goods.<sup>32</sup> In contrast, there was countless corsair activity in the Eastern Mediterranean during the war of Austrian succession (1740–1748), gathering many French sailors, adventurers, and mercenaries without leaving documentary traces. Even if there is ‘veracity’ in the French vessel shipwreck under the alleged captain Rodolphe Barack Famard, it is difficult to find an immediate causal link with Macao: the trade intermediation functions of the Portuguese–Chinese enclave did not include the far away Mediterranean maritime economy of the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

Although it seems evident from the researched epochal sources that our Rodolfo was able to read and write in French to produce a detailed receipt of expenses and rubricate his invented signature, forge passports, or manufacture fake bills of exchange, it does not seem plausible that his arranged identity as the prince of Macao was inspired by any particular intellectual readings. It is worth mentioning that,

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only between 1700 and 1747, at least 24 published textual memoirs described Macao to the curiosity of many French readers. If some of these texts, namely written by active missionaries in China, were not easily available to the general public, there was plenty of accessible information about Macao in at least 12 popular published dictionaries, mainly of geography, a much more cosmopolitan science in this period.<sup>33</sup> Some of these titles, such as the very popular *Dictionnaire Géographique Portatif*, organised by Jean Baptiste Ladvocat, published in 1747, were quite accessible and cheap in their small paperback formats. They teach everything essential to identify Macao: 'city built by the Portuguese with three large fortresses, a majority Chinese population, and a dual political system that included a governor sent from Portugal, strong municipal Macanese power, a Catholic bishop, and vigilant Chinese mandarins who, under the orders of the viceroy of Canton, sought to control the arrival of foreign trade vessels.'<sup>34</sup>

All the known texts from the first half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, including those using the word colony, printed, plus manuscripts, or other documents, from official files to maps or iconography, ever represented Macao as a 'monarchic' territory of kings, princes, or 'grand lords'. Therefore, the police and judicial authorities of a busy trading and 'corsair' port like Morlaix would have no difficulty gathering credible information summary about Macao and immediately raising well-founded suspicions about Rodolfo's princely clumsy claims. Moreover, this abundant mid-18<sup>th</sup> century information has easily allowed Dupont's parodic prose to transform the diligent local 'inspector' Moreau into a personage as informed about Macao as a proficient Latinist, throwing the false Prince Rodolfo into the undisputed position of an accomplished scoundrel. The common petit-bourgeois Parisian readers of a very popular daily newspaper such as the *Journal*

*des Débats Politiques et Littéraires* would applaud Moreau's inquiry that unmasks the pretence of the Macao prince, certainly displaying a patronising or even xenophobic voyeuristic smile of moral convenience, plus admiration for the serious 18<sup>th</sup>-century action of the French provincial 'forces of order'. It is not necessary to explain at length that Joly and Dupont were interested in their works, typical of local amateur history, in extolling their city and the unique cultural region of maritime Brittany.

The repeated insistence of our libertine Rodolfo in passing through the ports of Brittany as a prince of Macao should be explained from a global historical perspective without the points of views and limits of local curiosity: were there many French vessels with traders, sailors, pilots, officers, and other naval workers who knew and visited Macao during the period of the adventures and incarceration of our extravagant 'prince'? Since the first maritime voyage that directly linked France to China via Macao in 1698, made by the sailing ship *Amphitrite*<sup>35</sup> to 1750, there were more than seventy French trade trips going to the seasonal Canton fairs, mostly seafaring from Lorient. They left us tens of logbooks, some memoirs and other documents.<sup>36</sup> This documentation clearly explains that once the vessels arrived at the maritime boundaries of the enclave, it was necessary to obtain trade authorisation from the city's Chinese and Portuguese authorities and an official pilot to make the complicated inland river trip up to the anchorage of Whampoa, which was the furthest point that foreign vessels were permitted to proceed when heading to the seasonal trade market in Guangzhou generally held between late July and early November. Upon their arrival in Whampoa, circa 20 km from Canton (nowadays part of the metropolis urban territory), foreign ships unloaded their cargo to small Chinese sampans that transported the goods



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to the so-called 'fairs'. In Macao, it was also necessary to hire a 'buyer' (*comprador*), the head of a company mixing Chinese, Eurasians, and Portuguese, who was responsible for all supplies of ships, translation, and interpretation services, plus facilitating trade contacts and purchases in Canton. The vessels stopped again near Macao on their return to Europe after the Guangzhou market was closed, as it was the commercial and accounting services of very specialised companies in the city that did the labelling packaging, and bilingual or trilingual description of goods, including the identification of dozens of different types of tea or silk, also establishing international weights, volumes, and prices, in addition to resolving recurring commercial conflicts with bilingual legal services and arbitration.<sup>37</sup> On the way back, essential supplies, ranging from sails, rigging, food, clothing, and military artillery, were purchased in Macao for the long return journey to Europe. It is also documented that many of these French vessels, which usually saw part of their crew die during the long journey between Europe and China, purchased African and Asian slaves in Macao, especially from the islands of Timor, to fill their primary workforce.<sup>38</sup> Throughout the 18<sup>th</sup> century, these Macao services were indispensable for European foreign trade in the great southern Chinese city. This connection was significantly reinforced with the official opening of the so-called 'Canton system' in 1757 that wouldn't exist without the intermediation and services provided by Macao.<sup>39</sup>

It should also be clarified that these sizeable commercial European sailing ships were unable to dock in the very silted-up inner port of Macao, much less in the low bays, beaches, and piers of the peninsula, laying anchor in the natural harbour between the two islands of Taipa Grande and Taipa Pequena. Facing Macao, this harbour

provided adequate depth, sufficient protection against typhoons, and ship repair services. The many hundreds of French crew and sailors on these successive voyages until 1750 could barely see the silhouette of Macao from afar, a city they could only dream of since visits, usually fast, were only made by captains and their immediate mats. All the others could only indulge in lively exercises of imagination about the unique Portuguese–Chinese city, certainly feeling excited by the obligatory visit of the mandarins and officials from the Chinese Customs of Macao, the *hopu*, by 'compradores' and the numerous junks and *tankas* seafaring in the area. These numerous vessels, mixing work, fishing, transport, and housing, tried insistently every day to sell the most varied products, from food to cheap souvenirs such as fans, clothes, or jewellery imitations. They were also regarded with surprise for launching countless thunderous fireworks, from early morning to nightfall, to celebrate a good departure, arrival or deal, the deity of the day or the goddess A-Ma, the protector of the seafarers and fishermen of Macao and its neighbouring region. The French crews also heard noisy cannon shots fired from the Portuguese fortresses of Monte and Guia as foreign vessels arrived and departed, but they could hardly see the white flags of the Portuguese monarchy on their bastions. Hundreds of humble sailors returned to France without visiting the city they recalled by perceptions and stories. There were undoubtedly many shared oral accounts between the anecdote and the imagination about Canton and Macao among the French sailors who were there but without having seen more than a distant outline of the city.

Rodolfo's princely appropriation of Macao must have been suggested by the abundant and probably bizarre oral stories that circulated among these many French sailors, traders, and adventurers who, leaving mainly from the port of

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Lorient, reached the end of a long voyage to trade in Guangzhou passing through Macao without ever, after all, setting foot in the two cities. They certainly heard vibrant reports from the ships' captains and officers about their visits to Macao since Guangzhou was closed to foreigners. The oral accounts of these lengthy and singular voyages were certainly transformed into fantastic, adventurous, and entertaining stories in the maritime culture of the ports of Brittany, where most of these seamen sailing to the Asian seas were recruited.

The fabulous invention of the false identity of 'Rodolfo' as the prince of Macao must be interpreted within these popular cultural practices that often-fuelled attitudes of boastfulness which was probably common among these seamen from the ports of Brittany who, between privateering and commerce, lived distant maritime adventures that they transformed into oral amusing and heroic stories with which they impressed 'virile' sailors' audiences and seduced women of 'easy' life. These adventurous accounts, merging live experiences and plenty of invented imagination, generated cases of folkloric and popular 'libertinage' and created some fabulous characters and heroic eccentricities. Rodolfo, or Rodolphe Barack Famard, was undoubtedly one of them. The criminal records that described him as a 'superb black man', fancy dressed, do not hide surprise and a certain admiration, while the Bicêtre hospital documents recall an exotic character represented in-between an 'Arabe' and a 'Hindu', revered by his fellow prisoners, and some jail guards, under that brief official identification of 'Barack', the 'prince of Macao'. However, his social and cultural identity is difficult to assert. The suggested identification as the 'son of Jacques and Elisabeth Bart from Valenciennes' lacks today in the available archives any remote documental evidence.

In contrast, its physical and cultural portrait can, with some effort, indicate a very little-studied

group of sailors and pilots with exceptional skills in navigation in the Indian Ocean who were mobilised by European trade since the end of the 15<sup>th</sup> century in the main ports of Mozambique, Kenya, Tanzania and, later, the islands of Mascarenes, Madagascar, and Comoros. There is no need to remember at length that Vasco da Gama recruited an Omanid Arab pilot in Malindi to reach in 1498 Calicut, in India, a process that most Portuguese captains sailing from Eastern Africa to India followed afterwards. Despite appearing late in this Indian Ocean trade, the French East India Company started the slave trade on the African coasts and islands in the second half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century with the systematic recruitment of free men, pilots, sailors, and other skilled workers. Can this process suggest a possible genealogy that includes a man with the anthropo-physical and vaguely cultural characteristics assigned to our Rodolfo?<sup>40</sup>

In any case, it seems evident that our would-be 'prince of Macao' was a man with enough knowledge and experience of sea travel to leave the Bicêtre prison hospital fast, probably cured and forcefully recruited for the French East India Company overseas trade. We do not know how many trips Rodolfo made and whether he was ever close to Macao on any of them, but his last and fatal maritime adventure is well documented. On March 7, 1758, he left Lorient on the sailing ship *Rôle de la Baleine* bound for Pondichéry, then the most important French commercial enclave in India. Rodolfo, always naturally spelled as Rodolphe, appears significantly as a 'sailors' bossman' at around 33 years of age. The vessel sailed from Brittany to Rio de Janeiro; from here, it went around the Cape of Good Hope, then made stops in the Mascarenes and Madagascar, heading towards Pondichéry, where English ships arrested it at sea. Imprisoned, possibly injured or ill again, Rodolfo was finally sent to the Fareham Navy

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hospital near the port of Portsmouth, England. He died on February 12, 1763, certainly not yet 40 years old.<sup>41</sup> The life of Macao's strangest prince was over, fulfilling the statements he had made to the Morlaix police when he claimed that he had arrived at the city port to try to get to England.

His incredible story proved through a falsification between mythomania and libertinage that Macao was much more than a referential city of commerce in the 18<sup>th</sup> century to become a locus of exciting adventures and imagined exoticisms that reached the world of international maritime trade. **RC**

## NOTES

- 1 Aristide Joly, "Les Lettres de Cachet: dans la Généralité de Caen au XVIII<sup>e</sup> Siècle, d'Après des Documents Inédits," in *Mémoires Lus à la Sorbonne dans les Séances Extraordinaires du Comité Imperial des Travaux Historiques et des Sociétés Savantes* (Paris: Imprimerie Impériale, 1864), 424.
- 2 Étienne Dupont, "Un Prince Nègre et la Police au XVIII<sup>e</sup> Siècle," *Journal des Débats Politiques et Littéraires*, 135 année, no. 223 (Jeudi, 16 Août 1923): 1. This account with some textual arrangement was later republished in a later edition of Étienne Dupont, *Les Corsaires Chez Eux* (Morlaix: Coëtquen Editions, 2016), 117–122.
- 3 This is a well-known historical press title founded in 1789 by a printer named Baudouin, originally with the objective to follow and publicise the debates in the French National Assembly after the Revolution. Purchased in 1799 by the Bertin brothers — Louis-François Bertin (1766–1841) and his younger namesake Louis-François Bertin de Veaux (1771–1842) — it was renamed as *Journal de l'Empire*, and between 1814 and 1944 adopted finally this name of *Journal des Débats Politiques et Littéraires*. In the last years of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the first two decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the journal printed about one million daily copies. It was suppressed after the Liberation of Paris, in August 1944, accused of collaborationism (Dominique Kalifa and Philippe Régner, *La Civilisation du Journal. Histoire Culturelle et Littéraire de la Presse Française au XIX<sup>e</sup> Siècle* (Paris: Nouveau Monde Éditions, 2011), 181–211.
- 4 Dupont, *Les Corsaires*, 118.
- 5 Archives du Département du Calvados (ADC), C/430 — "Détention de particuliers dans des maisons de force ou de correction: dossier Rodolphe Barak se prétendant prince de Macao, accusé d'avoir fait de fausses lettres de change qu'il a présentées à des négociants de Caen": Ms. 1749, September 24 — Morlaix, 4 fls.; Ms. 1749, December 26 — Versailles, 1 fl.; Ms. 1750, February 8 — Rennes, 1 fl.; Ms. 1750, February 17 — Versailles, 1 fl.; Ms. 1750, March 18 — St. Germain, 1 fl. (Caen: Henri Delesques, 1905).
- 6 Joachim Darsel, *Le Port de Morlaix et la Guerre de Course* (Morlaix: Le Bouquiniste, 2005); Jean-François Jacq, *L'Âge d'or des Corsaires (1643–1815): Morlaix, Paimpol, Bréhat, Binic* (Rennes: Éditions Apogée, 2011); André Lespagnol, *La Course Malouine au Temps de Louis XIV. Entre l'Argent et la Gloire* (Rennes: Éditions Apogée, 1995).
- 7 Dupont, *Les Corsaires*, 119.
- 8 In the primary archive documentation, the agent is identified simply as Georges Moreau, 'exempt of the constabulary of Morlaix', namely in several difficult processes from 1744–1745 involving traders, corsairs, riggers and sailors; See Archives Départementales Calvados (ADC), *Inventaire-Sommaire des Archives Départementales Antérieures à 1790. Amirauté de Morlaix* (Caen: Henri Delesques, 1905), 99–100; Moreau certainly made many enemies during these arrests and hearings since he was murdered in early 1751 by a certain Jean-Jacques Bouville sentenced on March 5, 'having his hand cut off and being hanged' (see ADC, *Inventaire-Sommaire*, 106).
- 9 ADC, C/430, Ms. 1749, September 24 — Morlaix, fl. 1.
- 10 ADC, C/430, Ms. 1749, September 24 — Morlaix, fl. 1.
- 11 ADC, C/430, Ms. 1749, September 24 — Morlaix, fl. 1.
- 12 ADC, C/430, Ms. 1749, September 24 — Morlaix, fls. 1–2.
- 13 Dupont, "Un Prince Nègre," 1; Darsel, *Le Port de Morlaix*, 185–186; Dupont, *Les Corsaires*, 119–120.
- 14 ADC, C/430, Ms. 1749, September 24 — Morlaix, fl. 2.
- 15 ADC, C/430, Ms. 1749, September 24 — Morlaix, fl. 3.
- 16 Dupont, "Un Prince Nègre," 1; Darsel, *Le Port de Morlaix*, 186; Dupont, *Les Corsaires*, 120–121.
- 17 ADC, C/430, Ms. 1749, December 26 — Versailles, fl. 1.
- 18 ADC, C/430, Ms. 1750, February 8 — Rennes, fl. 1.
- 19 ADC, C/430, Ms. 1750, February 17 — Versailles, fl. 1.
- 20 Michel Morineau, "Budgets Populaires en France au XVIII<sup>e</sup> Siècle," *Revue d'Histoire Économique et Sociale*, vol. 50, no. 2 (1972): 221–223.
- 21 ADC, *Inventaire-Sommaire*, 78, n. 1.
- 22 Dupont, "Un Prince Nègre," 1; Dupont, *Les Corsaires*,

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- 121–122.
- 23 Paul Bru, *Histoire de Bicêtre (Hospice – Prison – Asile) d'Après des Documents Historiques* (Paris: Aux Bureaux du Progrès – Lecrosnier et Babè, 1890), 25–33.
- 24 Bibliothèque Nationale de France (BNF): Manuscrits de la bibliothèque de l'Arsenal; Archives de la Bastille – Deuxième section, Prisonniers Dossiers Individuels (1700–1750), Ms. 11696, 11697, 11698.
- 25 BNF: Manuscrits de la bibliothèque — Deuxième section, Ms. 11697, fls. 30–167.
- 26 BNF: Manuscrits de la bibliothèque — Deuxième section, Ms. 12685, fls. 97–99.
- 27 BNF: Manuscrits de la bibliothèque — Deuxième section, Ms. 11697, fls. 70–75.
- 28 BNF: Manuscrits de la bibliothèque — Deuxième section, Ms. 11697, fl. 71.
- 29 Jean Astruc, *De Morbis Veneris Libri Sex. In Quibus Disseritur Tum de Origine, Propagatione & Contagione Horumque Affectuum in Genere: Tum de Ungulorum Natura, Aetologia & Therapeia* (Paris: Guillelmum Cavelier, 1736).
- 30 BNF: Manuscrits de la bibliothèque de l'Arsenal; Archives de la Bastille — Troisième section, Administration Intérieure de la Bastille et de quelques autres prisons. Bicêtre: documents divers concernant la prison de Bicêtre. Etats des prisonniers et documents divers (1741–1751), Ms. 12685, fl. 97.
- 31 Archivo Histórico Nacional (AHN): Estado, 613, Exp. 23: *Consulta sobre petición de Real Cédula de aprobación del nombramiento de Antonio Bremond como Vicecónsul de Francia en Valencia, expedido por el Cónsul de dicha nación en el reino de Valencia, Juan Bautista Gayot* (1749–08–06, Madrid); Manuel Perez García, “Les Échanges Transnationaux et la Circulation des Nouveaux Produits em Mediterranée Occidentale au XVIIIe Siècle,” *Histoire, Économie & Société*, 30e année, no. 1 (2011): 49.
- 32 Archives Nationales: Secrétariat d'État de la Marine, Bureau des Consuls: *Correspondance consulaire de l'ambassadeur de France à Constantinople, 1709–1790* — AE/B/I/386–AE/B/I/418.
- 33 Denis Martineau du Plessis, *Nouvelle Geographie, ou Description Exacte de l'Univers* (Amsterdam: Chez George Gallet, 1700), 350–351; Charles Maty, *Dictionnaire Géographique Universel* (Utrecht: François Halma and Guillaume van de Water, 1701), vol. II: 619; Louis Baudrand & Jean Gelé, *Dictionnaire Géographique et Historique* (Paris: Denys Du Puis, 1705), II, cc. 1055; M. Vaultier, *Le Grand Dictionnaire Historique, ou Le Mélange de l'Histoire Sacrée et Profane* (Paris: Denys Mariette, 1707), vol. III: 603; Thomas Corneille, *Dictionnaire Universel, Géographique et Historique* (Paris: Jean Baptiste Coignard, 1708), vol. II: 540; Louis-Ellies du Pin, *Le Grand Dictionnaire Historique, ou Le Mélange Curieux de l'Histoire Sacrée et Profane* (Amsterdam: P. Brunel; Leiden: S. Luchtmans & C. Haak; The Hage: P. Gosse; Utrecht: E. Néaulme, 1711), vol. VI: 4; Nicolas Lenglet du Fresnoy, *Méthode pour Étudier la Géographie dans Laquelle on Donne une Description Exacte de l'Univers Tirée des Meilleurs Auteurs et Formée sur les Observations des Messieurs de l'Academie Royale des Sciences* (Paris: Charles Estienne Hochereau, 1716), vol. II: 372–373; *Dictionnaire Universel François et Latin, Contenant la Signification et la Définition Tant des Mots de l'Une et de l'Autre Langue, Avec Leurs Différens Usages, que des Termes Propres de Chaque État & de Chaque Profession; la Description de Toutes les Choses Naturelles & Artificielles; Leurs Figures, Leurs Espèces, Leurs Usages, & Leur Propriétés; l'Explication de Tout Ce que Renferment les Sciences & les Arts, sois Libéraux ou Mécaniques* (Trévoux: F. Delaulne, H. Foucault and M. Clousier, 1721), vol. III: [M] col. 4; Charles Noblot, *Géographie Universelle, Historique et Chronologique, Ancienne et Moderne* (Paris: Chez Antoine-Claude Briasson, 1725), V, 1, 306, 317–318, 327; Jacques Savary des Bruslons and Philémon-Louis Savary, *Dictionnaire Universel de Commerce, Contenant Tout Ce qui Concerne le Commerce dans les Quatre Parties du Monde* (Amsterdam: Chez les Jansons, à Waesberge, 1726), vol. I: cols. 1186–1188; Abraham du Bois, *La Géographie Moderne, Naturelle, Historique et Politique, dans une Méthode Nouvelle et Aisée* (Leiden: Pierre Vander Aa, 1729), vol. III: 675–676, 710; Antoine-Augustin Bruzen de La Martinière, *Le Grand Dictionnaire Géographique et Critique* (The Hague: P. Gosse; Amsterdam: H. Uitwerf & F. Changuion; Rotterdam: Jean Daniel Beman, 1735), vol. V, II Partie: 2–3; Jean Baptiste Ladvoat, *Dictionnaire Géographique Portatif, ou Description de tous les Royaumes, Provinces, Villes, Patriarchats, Évêchés, Duchés, Comtés, Marquisats, Villes Impériales et Anséatiques, Ports, Forteresses, Citadelles, et Autres Lieux Considérables des Quatre Parties du Monde* (Paris: Chez les libraires associés, 1747), 415; Ivo Carneiro de Sousa, *Memórias, Viagens e Viajantes Franceses por Macau (1609–1900)* (Macao: Instituto Cultural, 2022), vol. I: 218–275.
- 34 Ladvoat, *Dictionnaire Géographique Portatif*, 415; Sousa, *Memórias, Viagens e Viajantes*, I: 274–275.
- 35 Paul Pelliot, “L'Origine des Relations de la France Avec la Chine. Le Premier Voyage de “l'Amphitrite” en Chine,” *Journal des Savants* (Decembre de 1928–Mars de 1929): 111; Sousa, *Memórias, Viagens e Viajantes*, I: 77.
- 36 The most recent research by Susan E. Schopp on *Sino-French Trade at Canton, 1698–1842* lists a significant number of maritime voyages from France to Canton, totalling 77 for the period between 1698 and 1750. These voyages, whether private or mainly under the *Compagnie des Indes*, were added by other 2 departing from Surat and 9 from Pondicherry, the French trade enclaves in India. See Susan E Schopp, *Sino-*



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*French Trade at Canton, 1698–1842* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2020), 135–142. This study also inventories 55 manuscript ship logs from these voyages, some of which are repeated, most without information or very little detail on Macao (Schopp, *Sino-French Trade*, 166–167). The most important manuscript memories and the only singular known printed title from these voyages offering information and descriptions about the passage through Macao are published in Sousa, *Memórias, Viagens e Viajantes*, I: 201–277.

- 37 Ivo Carneiro de Sousa, “Macao’s Crucial Role in Defining the Greater Bay Area (1700–1842),” *Macao*, no. 10 (2023): 69–75.

- 38 Sousa, *Memórias, Viagens e Viajantes*, IV: 37–38.  
 39 Paul A. Van Dyke, *The Canton Trade. Life and Enterprise on the China Coast, 1700–1845* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2005), 143–160.  
 40 Olivier Fontaine, “Les Esclaves de Marine de la Compagnie des Indes e du Roi, de 1718 à 1790,” *Nouvelles Approches*, no. 7 (2010): 361–373.  
 41 Archive du Service Historique de la Défense à L’Orient (ASHDL): Fonds de la Compagnie Perpétuelle des Indes Orientale, 1P-196B-668, fl. 44.

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*Arrêt du conseil d’état portant permission de vendre les étoffes arrivées de la Chine par le vaisseau L’Amphitrite*. Paris: Chez François Muguet, 1700, 1–4; *Relation d’un voyage en Chine consacré à la marquise de Maintenon*, Mss. CV–89.6.

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